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SUBJECT: EASTERN DRC NOTES - MARCH 10; IDP UPDATE FOR NORTH KIVU

¶1. (U) The items contained in this report consist principally of spot information from various sources. This report is not exhaustive, nor can all the information contained therein be confirmed at this time.

¶2. (SBU) U.S. personnel met on March 9 with Gloria Fernandez, head of OCHA in the DRC, to discuss the current IDP problem in various areas of North Kivu. She said that in Rutshuru there has been a considerable number of returns overall. The timing of the planting season has encouraged return, as has the relative improvement of the local security climate.

¶3. (SBU) However, the situation in Masisi is more complicated. There has been a considerable number of returnees overall, but the area west of Masisi is still somewhat insecure and a number of the IDP's from this region (who fled into South Kivu) are remaining in place for the moment. Fernandez also reported that there are new IDP's coming to Masisi town from areas northwest of Masisi where there is conflict with the FDLR and/or threats and intimidation from the armed group. There is also misbehavior on the part of the newly integrated FARDC in Masisi and an overall climate of lawlessness.

¶4. (SBU) In Lubero, Fernandez said that the FDLR has pushed some populations east, into the forest, where it is impossible to reach them with humanitarian assistance. In the Kichanga-Mweso area the newly integrated forces are harassing, intimidating and looting the population and NGO's. Both UN agencies and NGO's have been on the receiving end of violence; for example, convoys have been abducted and looted, and one even came under fire. MSF, which had been working in the Mewso-Pinga area, has pulled out. ICRC assets/personnel have been attacked three times. A similar problem exists in the south of Lubero Territory. The area northwest of Kaina is particularly insecure at this time and NGO's have pulled out from this region.

¶5. (SBU) Fernandez said that this overall climate of insecurity has itself produced new IDP's and a hostile environment in general for humanitarians and humanitarian assistance. She said that she had spoken with four FARDC field commanders on this issue but they have done nothing to help. She has also been trying to see General Numbi, so far to no avail, and indicated as well that the higher political echelons of MONUC do not appear to have engaged on this matter.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The main perpetrator of the abuses which Fernandez referenced appears to be the FARDC, though the FDLR is also complicit. Fernandez's difficulty in identifying and speaking with an effective army interlocutor would seem to demonstrate that the FARDC command remains either incapable or unwilling to create and maintain a disciplined force. Her mention of the newly integrated units as responsible for perpetuating such abuses is worrisome and suggests the integration process may be proceeding too quickly. End comment.

GARVELINK